

**A "NEW YEARS
GIFT": AN HITHERTO
LOST TREATISE**

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A "New Years Guift": An Hitherto Lost Treatise by Robert Browne

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BY

ROBERT BROWNE

The Father of Congregationalism

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PREFACE

I gladly comply with the request of Mr. Burrage to write a few words of preface to his work. Having examined the MS. I am fully assured of its genuineness; and thoroughly endorse his estimate of its value. It is, indeed, in my opinion the most important contribution to early Nonconformist history that has come to light since Dr. Dexter's recovery (about 1875) of the *Trus and Short Declaration*.

I have sought in vain for any identification of the "Mr. Flower" to whom the Treatise is addressed, and whom Browne calls "Uncle." From such genealogical lists as I have been able to consult it does not appear that any sister, either of Anthony Browne or his wife (who was a daughter of Sir Ph. Boteler of Hertfordshire) was married to a person bearing that name. Indeed, the only occurrence of the name in connection with the Browne family is a Tristram Flower, who married Robert Browne's grand-niece—born 1593. Possibly "Mr. Flower" may have been an uncle of R. Browne's wife, Alice Allen. This is a question which Yorkshire genealogists might profitably investigate.

T. G. CRIPPEN

INTRODUCTION

I

THE WRITINGS OF ROBERT BROWNE

PROBABLY the earliest person to make a bibliographical list of works for and against Brownism was Peter Fairlambe. In 1606 he wrote "The Recantation of a Brownist." , in which (pp. 18, 19) he includes such a list. In this he mentions the following writings of Robert Browne:—"For the Brownists or Donatists thiese M. Browne, his booke against Logick and Rethorick, and of the estate of the Christians and Heathens, His Inuectiue against parish Preachers, and hired Lecturers, and against Preaching at Paules Crosse, and his answere to M. Cartwrights Letter to M. Robert Harryson, his consort: His aunswere in writing, to Steephen Bridewell. His first booke against Brownists for his 2 about Communicating, was neuer answered. And Brownes Booke of the gathering and ioyning together of certaine persons in Norfolke,"

Fairlambe had been a Brownist, he says, for many years, and had been banished from England on that account. He should write, therefore, with some authority. He certainly knew of one of Browne's writings not known to exist to-day, but on the other hand he evidently had not heard of the Letter to Mr. Flower, with which we are chiefly concerned, nor of "a treatise of his against one *Barowe*," though both of these were known to Richard Bancroft. It might even seem at first sight as if Fairlambe had made up the list of Browne's writings from the titles

mentioned toward the close of Stephen Bredwell's "The Rasing of the Fovndations of Brownisme," London, 1588 ; but on the other hand Bredwell seems to have known certain productions of Browne's that Fairlambe does not mention, so that Fairlambe may actually have seen the works to which he makes reference. Even Bredwell does not speak of the writings cited by Bancroft. It may therefore be profitable to enumerate here all the productions of Robert Browne, of which the writer remembers to have seen mention made, whether at present known or unknown, in the hope that those as yet lost may some time be found.

Thus far the Rev. T. G. Crippen, Librarian of the Congregational Library, London, has given perhaps the best list* of Browne's writings. It is now possible, however, to add several items to those given by Mr. Crippen. His list the present writer makes the foundation of this new one ; and, except for a few slight corrections, which now seem desirable, he merely adds thereto. The augmented list comprises :—

1. *A Treatise of Reformation without tarying for Anie, and of the wickednesse of those Preachers, which will not reforme till the Magistrate commaunde or compell them.* 4to., 18pp., 1582. Only three copies known ; at Lambeth, the British Museum, and Yale University. Reprinted lately at Boston ; and by the Congregational Historical Society, London, *Transactions No. 11*, and separately.

2. *A Treatise vpon the 23 of Matthewe, both for an order of studying and handling the Scriptures, and also auoyding the Popishe disorders, and vngodly communion of all false Christians, and especiallie of wicked Preachers and hirelings.* 4to., 44pp., 1582. Copies in the British Museum (defective) and at Lambeth.†

3. *A Booke which Sheweth the life and Manners of all true Christians, and howe vnlike they are vnto Turkes and Papistes, and Heathen folke. Also the pointes and partes of all Diuinitie, that is of the reuealed will and worde of God, are declared by their seuerall Definitions, and Diuisions in*

*In his admirable reprint of Browne's *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie.* London, 1903. p. 14.

†This contains, as distinct sections, what Fairlambe calls "his booke against Logick and Rethorick . . . His Inuectiue against parish Preachers, and hired Lecturers, and against Preaching at Paules Crosse."

order as followeth. 4to., 111pp., 1582. Copies in the Bodleian, Lambeth, British Museum, Trinity College Cambridge, and Congregational Libraries. These three were intended to be bound together, as is the case with the British Museum copy.

4. *An Answer to Master Cartwright his Letters for joyning with the English Churches; whereunto the true copie of his sayde letter is annexed.* 4to., 2-85-11pp. [1583?]. Copies in the Bodleian and Williams's Libraries.

5. *A True and Short Declaration, Both of the Gathering and Joyning together of certaine Persons; and also of the Lamentable Breach and Diuision which fell amongst them.* 4to., 24pp. [1584?]. An unique copy at Lambeth. Reprinted in 1888 in the "Congregationalist," London.

6. *An Hitherto Lost Treatise (in the form of a Letter to his Uncle, Mr. Flower), now first published.* Written December 31, 1588 (Old Style).

7. *A Letter to Burghley.* 15 April, 1590. Among the Lansdowne MSS. in the British Museum. It was printed by Strype.

To these may be added the following, all of them probably in manuscript, but as yet unlocated even if they exist:—

8. *A Conference with M[r]. E.[dmond?] and M[r]. F [ar. ?].*

9. *Aunswere to Stephen Bridewell his first book against Brownists.* 1588. Probably a letter.

10. *A Treatise. . . against one Barowe* [1588?]. Probably a letter.

11. *Letters written at Stamford before his subscription by request of "M. Far. & M. Har. Londoners," somewhat to the effect that "it was not vnlawful to heare the Word in our assemblies" [of the Established Church] in order to "perswade his followers at London thereunto."* Written before November 1586.

12. *A seuerall treatisse in Latine, touching the herring fishes, &c.* 1588 or earlier. Mentioned in the Letter to Flower.

13. *Latine tables and definitions.* Mentioned in the letter to Burleigh. This treatise may possibly have been based on material contained in Browne's so-called book against Logick and Rethorick.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE TREATISE

SOMEWHAT more than two years ago, when the writer was on his first visit to England, he found in the British Museum* a volume largely composed of letters in manuscript. One of these was signed, "Your Worships humble to commaund Robert Browne / written this last of December : 1588." It consisted of twelve folio pages, the text of the letter covering nine of them. It was in the main beautifully and compactly written in an uncommonly legible hand for that period ; and on the back of the last leaf, in another rather scrawly but contemporary hand, (which further investigation has proved to be that of Richard Bancroft, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury,) were the words :—

"M^r Brownes aunswer to M^r Flowers letter. for his iugement in diverse particuler pointes in this letter yo^u may not accompte of it : for he hath reformed them & hym selfe likewise. The wordes to be looked vppe I haue rase wth my pen."

The writer at once noticed the excellent preservation of this letter,—the clean untorn pages ; the regular writing, unmistakably like the facsimile of Robert Browne's signature in Dr. Henry Martyn Dexter's "The Congregationalism of the last Three Hundred Years," . . . ; and further the interesting character of some of the material in the letter.

About a year ago, on the writer's return to England, the same volume again came to his notice. Once more he became interested in the manuscript, and, desiring to gain a greater familiarity with the peculiar handwriting of that period, he began to decipher the document, intending, if it proved valuable, to read it through, and to make at the same time a legible transcript. Several days passed, and a good part of the text had already been transcribed, when one evening the writer happened to think it might be worth while to see if Dr. Dexter knew of the existence of this particular

*Add. MS. 29,546 ; fol. 67-72.